

A Validation Study on Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland

Simon Hugi and Ben Jann

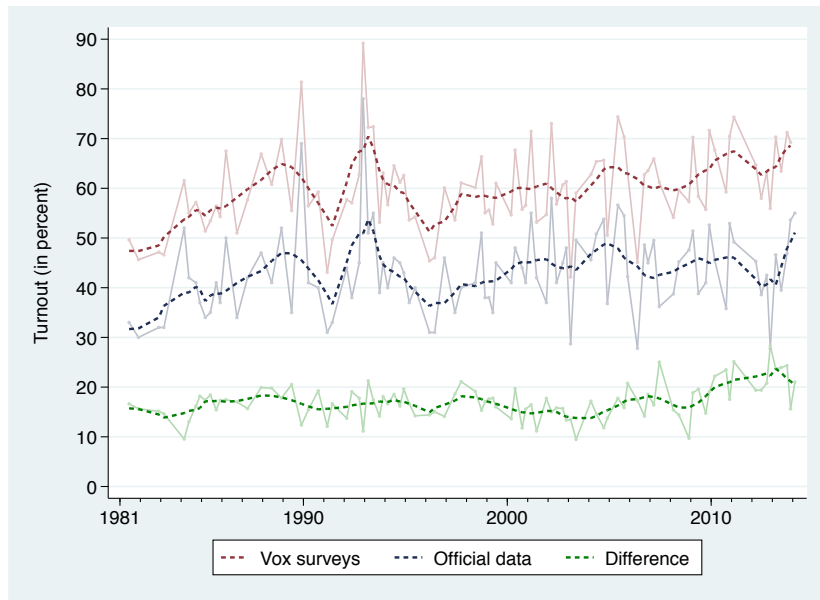
University of Bern, ben.jann@soz.unibe.ch

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Outline

- Introduction
- Our study
- Results
- Conclusions

Introduction: Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland



Source: Own calculations based on the most recent VOX dataset.

Introduction: Research Questions

- What are the mechanisms that lead to the observed turnout bias in Swiss voting and election studies?
- How much do the different mechanisms contribute to the total bias?
- Is it possible to reduce the bias by special questioning techniques or weighting schemes?

Introduction: Types of Biases

● Undercoverage

- ▶ Sampling frames typically do not cover the whole population.
- ▶ Political participation is likely to be lower among uncovered subpopulations (e.g. young people without landline) than among covered subpopulations, leading to a positive bias in survey estimates of voter turnout (Mokrzycki, Keeter und Kennedy 2009, Blumberg und Luke 2007)

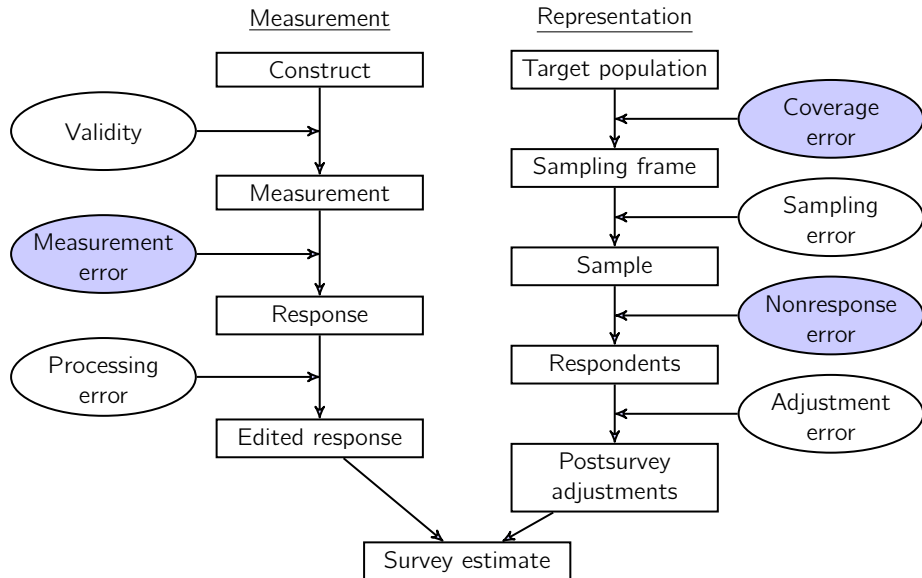
● Nonresponse

- ▶ Participation in surveys correlates with political interest and political participation (Voogt und Saris 2003, Jackman 1999, Brehm 1993).

● Misreporting

- ▶ Due to social desirability (Tourangeau und Yan 2007) and recall errors (Belli et al. 1999), respondents tend to overreport their participation behavior.

Introduction: Types of Biases

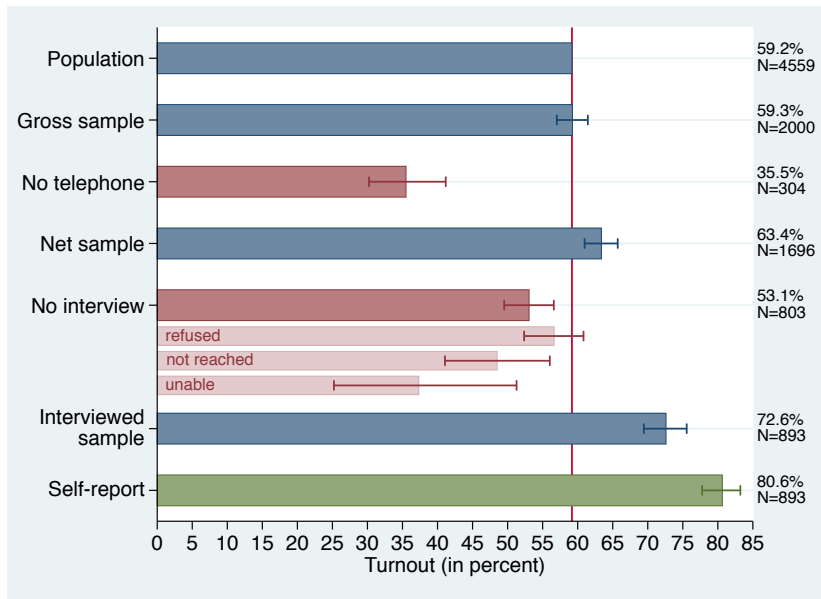


(Groves et al. 2009:48)

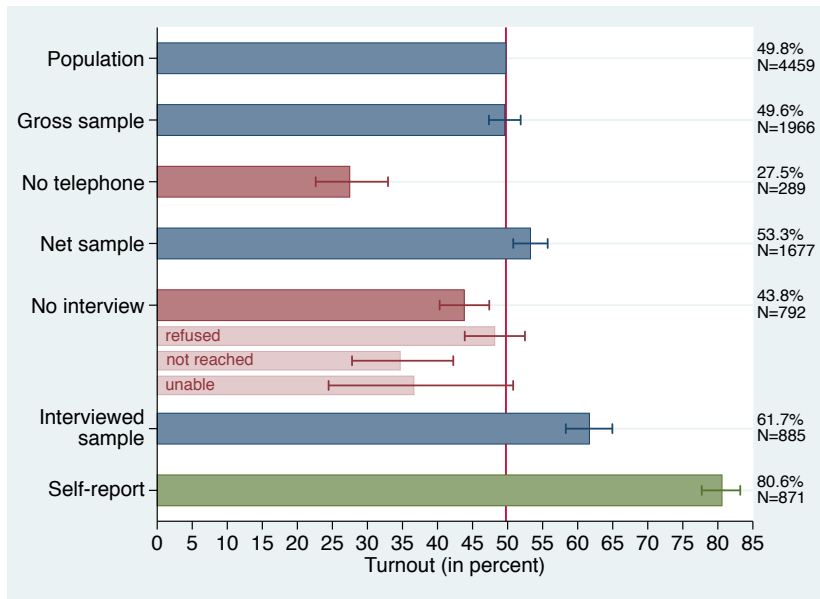
Our Study

- Voter turnout validation study comparing survey data to polling cards at a small municipality in Switzerland.
- Polling cards
 - ▶ Federal votes of September 22 and June 9, 2013.
 - ▶ Citizens who took part in the votes can be identified from the collected polling cards.
- Survey
 - ▶ Gross sample of 2000 citizens from the municipality's register.
 - ▶ Net sample of 1696 (84.8%) citizens whose households could be found in the telephone register.
 - ▶ CATI survey between September 23 and October 20 with 893 respondents (52.7% of net sample).
 - ▶ Questions on: political interest, participation the votes, social desirability of voting, key indicators of political participation research, social demographics.
 - ▶ Wording experiment voting question.

Main Results: September 22 Vote



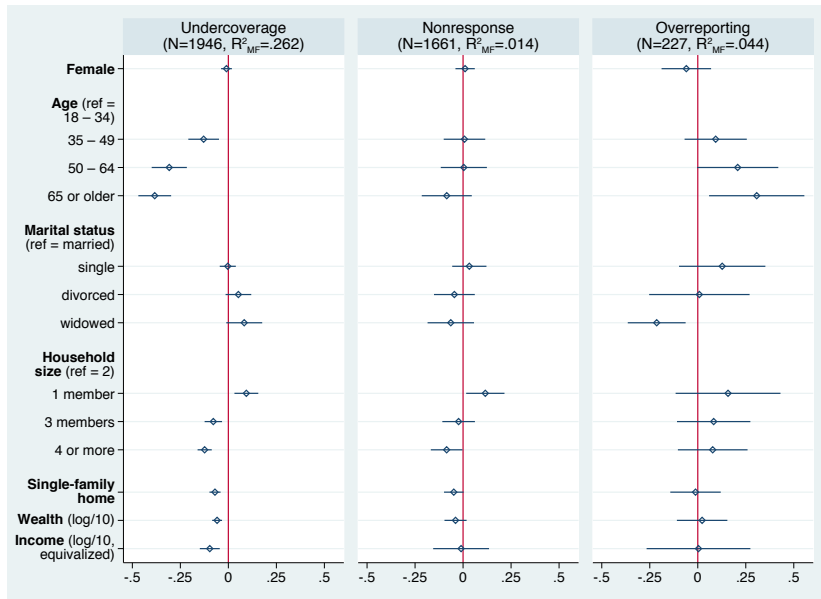
Main Results: June 9 Vote



Over- and Underreporting

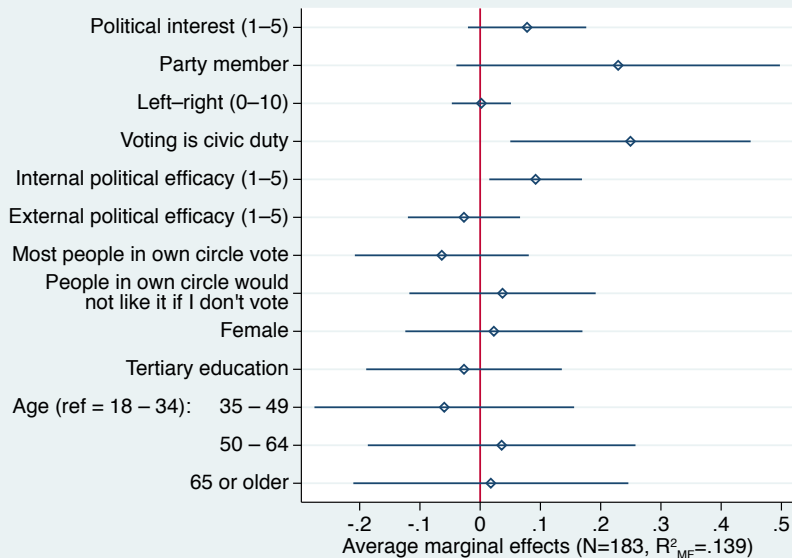
September 22	self-report		Total
	did not vote	voted	
polling cards			
– did not vote	69.6	30.4	100.0
– voted	0.4	99.6	100.0
			(N = 893)
June 9	self-report		Total
	did not vote	voted	
polling cards			
– did not vote	45.8	54.2	100.0
– voted	3.2	96.8	100.0
			(N = 864)

Sociodemographic Profiles (September 22 Vote)



Average marginal effects from logistic regressions

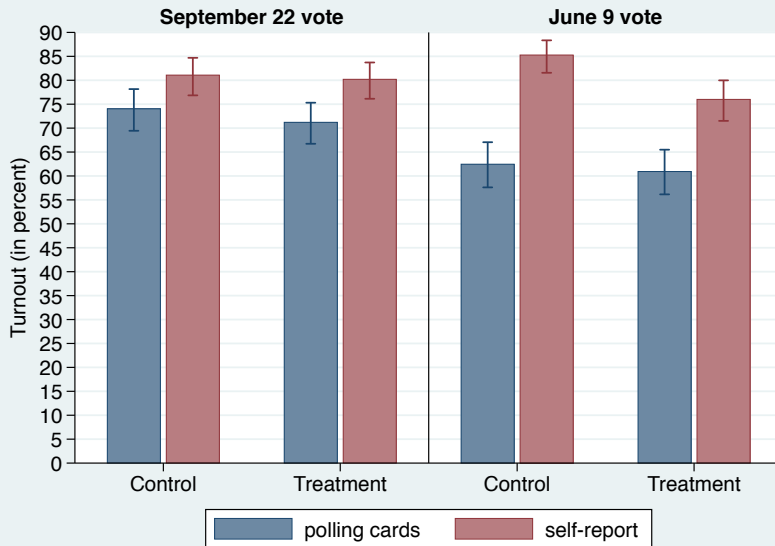
Determinants of Overreporting (September 22 Vote)



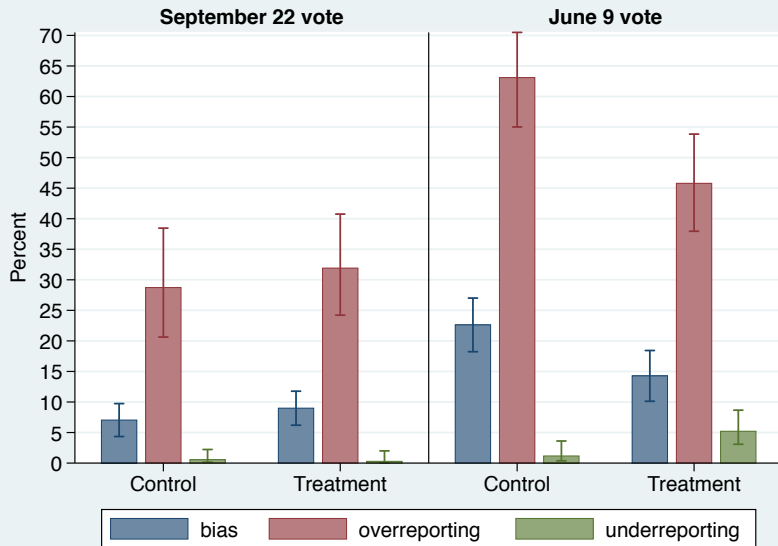
Wording Experiment

- The sample was randomized into a control group and a treatment group.
- The control group received a standard voting question.
 - ▶ „How about you, did you vote or not?“
- The treatment group received a modified voting question intended to minimize social-desirability bias and recall errors.
 - ▶ „Please try to remember whether you read the voting documents and whether you voted in person or by mail. Which of the following statements does apply to you?“
 - ★ I did not vote.
 - ★ I thought about voting, but did not.
 - ★ I usually vote, but did not this time.
 - ★ I am sure I did vote.

Wording Experiment: Results



Wording Experiment: Results



Summary and Conclusions

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting jointly contribute to the participation bias in survey data; contribution of overreporting increases over time.

	Sept 22		June 9	
	PP	%	PP	%
Sampling error	.1	0.4	-.2	-0.5
Undercoverage	4.1	19.2	3.7	11.9
Nonresponse	9.2	43.0	8.4	27.3
Overreporting	8.0	37.4	18.9	61.3
Total bias	21.5	100.0	30.8	100.0

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting have differential sociodemographic profiles.
- The errors potentially affect associations and regression models estimated from survey data. Overreporting appears particularly problematic.
- Alternative wording to minimize social-desirability bias and recall errors did not lead to substantial improvement.

References

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